A Council of State Ministers of Panchyati Raj under the Chairmanship of the Union Minister for Panchayati Raj has been constituted to review the implementation of the recommendations. The first meeting of the Council was held on 5th-6th August, 2005 at Kochi, Kerala. A Committee of Chief Secretaries of States and State Panchayati Raj Secretaries has also been constituted under the Chairmanship of the Union Secretary (Panchayati Raj) to monitor the progress on the implementation of the 150 recommendations of the Seven Round Tables and the decisions of the Council of States Ministers of Panchayati Raj. Four review meetings of the Committee have so far been held in April, 2005, June, 2005, September, 2605, and November 2005.

With a view to interacting with Panchayats and carrying out a review with the authorities concerned of the progresss in implementing the points for action mutually agreed to in the round Tables, a process of visiting the States and UTs at the level of Union Minister for Panchayati Raj has been initiated. Seven States have been covered so far. These include Kamataka, West Bengal, Uttaranchal, Haryana, Chhattisgarh, Orissa and Arunachal Pradesh. Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh are next on the list. Each visit is concluded with a Statement of Conclusions jointly signed with the Chief Minister of the State concerned, laying out the points of action on which the State would move to operationalise the recommendations of the Round Tables.

An exercise is underway to review different statutes with a view to harmonise them with the provisions of Part IX of the Constitution. Similarly, the guidelines of Centrally Sponsored Schemes are being reviewed to ensure the centrality of Panchayats in planning and implementation. As regards new Centrally Sponsored Schemes, wherever relevant, it is proposed to provide for a central role for Panchayats. Thus, for example, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act provides for the Panchayats to be the "principal authorities" for the planning and implementation of schemes under the Act. Steps are also being taken to fill in citical gaps in infrastructure and capacity so that Panchayats can effectively fulfill their constitutional role.

Setting up of Gram Nyayalayas

674. SHRI MANOJ BHATTACHARYA: Will the Minister of PANCHAYATI RAJ be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government propose to set up 'Gram Nyayalayas' in the country to provide easy, cheap and speedy justice to the people;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) by when, necessary legislative masure would be brought before Parliament?

THE MINISTER OF PANCHAYATI RAJ (SHRIMANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) to (c) Yes Sir. The question of bringing in a legislation to provide for the establishment of Gram Nyayalayas for the purposes of access to justice, both civil and criminal; to citizens at the grassroots level and ensuring them an opportunity for securing justice is being studied by the Government in the Ministry of Law and Justice. The modalities are being worked out. As the proposal involves deep study and careful consideration and wide range consultations are also required before the proposal is finalized, it would be difficult to lay down any rigid time-frame in this regard.

Women leaders in Panchayats

675. PROF. ALKA BALRAM KSHATRIYA: Will the Minister of PANCHAYATI RAJ be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that there are above ten lakh women leaders in Panchayats in the country;

(b) if so, whether Government are taking any steps to enable women to take active role in the matter relating to their village and taluk; and

(c) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF PANCHAYATI RAJ (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a)As per available information as on 01.04.2005, there were approximately 8,90,605 number of women representatives, at different levels of Panchayati Raj Institutions in the country. This is in addition to the Women elected to the urban local bodies, which would make the overall figure approximately ten lakh.

(b) and (c) Yes Sir. The Government supports capacity building training programmes for elected women representatives of panchayats so that they can effectively carry out their duties and responsibilities as envisaged in the Constitution, to take an active role in the matters relating to their village and taluk.

In order to evolve the National Consensus on the measure to be taken to strengthen Panchayati Raj, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj convened